2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



Native Authority, to the Native Authority, and eventually to the District Commissioner if the case is one which he will countenance. In practice, most cases reach the chief and go no further. Most people accept his decision. Thus the chief has important judicial functions.

### The Chief as the People's Representative

In special situations where the welfare of the chiefdom as a whole has been endangered by an infringement of the mores, the chief may take action. For example, a chief prosecutes a village headman who allows a woman in his village to bear her first child before she has been through the *litiwo* ceremony. Every woman who becomes pregnant for the first time must undergo this ceremony, during which she is instructed in child welfare and child care. If she bears a child without undergoing the ceremony, she is said to have 'spoilt the country' (*ajalowa ilambo*), in the sense that she has besmirched its reputation.[1]

Chiefs usually call in magicians[2] to smell out 'those responsible for keeping back the rain.'[3] When the rains fail as they did in 1948-9, their failure is held to be due to the magic of some evilly disposed person. It then becomes the chief's duty to call in a magician to indicate who this person is. The fees for this duty are paid by the chief himself on behalf of his people.

The chief also acts as a representative of his people when they are affected as a whole. For example, Nyambi called in a magician after man-eating lions had taken some of his subjects. This magician called for the hearth-stones and domestic utensils from all the villages in the area, and built them up into a pyramid over which he made some anti-lion medicine. This was to clear the whole chiefdom of man-eating lions.

Nowadays, the chief's representation of his people is seen most clearly in his position in the Administrative framework.[4] The chief represents the Administration to his people since they approach it through him. At the same time the Administration clearly treats him as the representative of his people and consults

[1] I was told in Myombi's area that the women undergo this ceremony *after* the birth of the child, but that it is still obligatory.

[2] *Kamose ulo*—lit. 'to tie or bind the rain', in the sense of to make it a prisoner.

[3] I have dealt with this aspect more fully in 'The Political Organization of the Yao of Southern Nyasaland'.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



TABLE IV

ORIGIN OF VILLAGES WHICH HAVE ARRIVED IN THE KAWINGA-LIWONDE AREA SINCE THE WHITE CONQUEST AND ARE STILL THERE

| Origin | [illegible] | [illegible] | [illegible] | [illegible] | [illegible] | [illegible] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Northern Areas:* | | | | | | | |
| Fort Johnston . . . | — | — | — | 6 | — | 1 | 7 |
| Nyasaki . . . . | — | 3 | — | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| Jalasi . . . . . | 1 | — | 10 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 21 |
| *Southern Area:* | | | | | | | |
| Malemia and Nsanangie | — | — | — | 8 | 7 | 28 | 43 |
| Zambia . . . . . | — | — | — | 4 | 7 | 4 | 15 |
| South of Zambia . . | — | — | — | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| *Other Nyasaland Areas:* | — | — | — | 3 | — | 2 | 5 |
| Port. E. Africa . . . | 13 | 36 | 111 | 37 | 6 | 30 | 273 |
| Unrecorded . . . . | — | — | — | 2 | 1 | 31 | 34 |
| Total . . . . . | 14 | 39 | 121 | 69 | 24 | 104 | 411 |

Africa. We have no record of how many villages have been lost to the Southern or Northern area from Kawinga-Liwonde area, so that we cannot evaluate the significance of the gain of 64 villages from Southern areas, and of only 35 from the Northern areas. The density of population in Malemia's area is 268 per square mile, and the average density of the Shire Highlands is about 150-6. It may well be that there is now a movement out of the Shire Highlands into the low density populated Liwonde-Kawinga area.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF PRIMACY

Migration and invasion have been the keynote of Machinga histories: village headmen recount with pride how their ancestors moved into Nyasaland with their bands of slaves and followers. 'The East' is the traditional home of the Yao and even young men who have never been there proudly say, 'We come from the East'. This sentiment is reflected in the belief that the rains from the east are beneficial and give rise to good crops, while the rains from the west are detrimental and cause

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



crop failures. Also I was told that important village headmen are buried with their heads pointing to the east.

The Yao concept of the past is reflected in the principles of political organization of these Machinga chiefdoms. The invasion is the datum point from which rank mainly stems. We may classify modern headmen into: those who were in the area before the Yao invasion, i.e. the Aborigines; the invaders; and those who have come in since the invasion and have had to submit themselves to the Machinga chief, i.e. the Newcomers. The principle behind this classification of headmen is fundamental to Yao political structure. Stated most simply it is the rule that MacDonald quoted in describing the development of local organization: 'However large the settlement may become the man that is first in is the chief or headman.'[1] This is, of course, somewhat of a simplification, but the rule contains the essence of the principle. It was reversed for the Aboriginal Nyanja because the Yao subjugated them. But the claims of the Nyanja chiefs to rank because they had occupied the land first were recognized by the Yao who absorbed them into the social structure in positions of high rank.

But the principle holds among the Yao themselves, and for the Ngoni in their movements after the White conquest. The operation of the principle is clearest in the structure of small local areas such as Chiwalo's. When Chiwalo's area was first settled, just after World War I, there were large tracts of unoccupied land. The first headmen to move into this region were Cigwaja, Kapalowa, Nyanja, Makata and Mumbwa. The local chief Chiwalo followed Cigwaja, but as Cigwaja was one of the lowest headmen under Chiwalo during the period of invasion, he now recognized Chiwalo as the chief. The area that is now Chiwalo's chiefdom was divided out among these five headmen. As other headmen came into the area they had to approach one of these five for land rights. These, when granted, were granted irrevocably in a block to the new village headman who then had sole rights to distribute the land afterwards. If he had the land to spare, he may have granted a portion of it to yet another village headman, and this action was also irrevocable. The land occupation pattern in any particular area is therefore extremely complex, because in addition to the village garden areas, indivi-

[1] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 147. See p. 31 above.

In Shawnee O-S (ca. 1910) 1922 FT? Yes FT?



*Lumbo Mbanga* is the greatest of lumbos, a man of great height who walks the round of the country, stepping from hill-top to hill-top along "the fairy way," the "*Mbira wa Lumbo Mbanga*," which is supposed to run right around Nyandoni and never to cross a river, starting and ending somewhere near the junction of the Shiri with the Sanford river. As he goes, he can be seen from a hundred miles away. He carries the *kalimba* instrument and plays as he walks, singing:

"*Kalira* [539] *ungu kungwa kulya unga mukimba wamuka, mbi!*"
"You cry out (in trouble) with the mulgra theodore I scare call up the troops, the swarm of hornets!"

which might be rendered, "You people grumble about small troubles, so I will teach you to know better by inflicting great ones." Where he is seen, there will be famine.

It will be convenient here to allude briefly to some of the beliefs concerned with meteorological phenomena, as some of them have a bearing on native religious beliefs. The remarks made under this heading for the Anyanja hold good for the Yao. The morning and evening stars are called *Namalota* and *Namyadenga*, the good rich and the bad rich. They are looked upon as the two wives of the moon, one of whom feeds him so well that he grows fat, the other who does not, so he wastes away. The constellation of the Pleiades is called *Dimba*; the Milky Way, *Lukinga mabia*, "the watcher of the night," when high in the heavens, there is near. When shooting stars are seen, natives exclaim "*mapala mbuji!*" *Mapala* is a many-pointed arrow. Eclipses are recognized but no explanation is vouchsafed. Thunder is supposed to be the noise of rain falling in the heavens before it reaches the earth. The rain is sometimes supposed to be the continuing stream from an enormous pot of water boiling over a furnace fire in heaven. The lightning is conceived as a lizard-like animal which dwells in the clouds and darts out from behind them and comes to earth and breaks up trees and may kill a man. Mire is supposed by the Yao to be its excrement. The animal is called *Njoni*, and in the same as *Mpumbo* of the Ankipetu who consider the mire to be the broken eggshell of the lightning dragons' eggs. There is a large red wrapound lily, a species of *Haemanthus* also called *Njoni*, which is in some way connected with the lightning. No Yao child would ever touch this flower. Children are always advised never to seek shelter under a big tree but always to make for a bamboo [539] thicket, for if the lightning strikes the bamboo and splits it, it will get caught inside the hollow stem.

Cakes of wheat are said to consume from a plant called *Chanyala*. It is described as having two prongs like an elephant's trunk and others like two fingers. It is found on the tops [541] of very high mountains, growing alone and surrounded by bare rock. This plant is used by medicine men to gain supernatural powers. *Chanyala* is also the name of a parasitic plant on the diseased trees in Nyasaland.

The world is taken by the natives as they find it; to them no explanation for its being is necessary. So far as I can find out, there is no idea among the Yao of a Creator. The